The Ludgate Hub

📍 **Skibbereen, County Cork**

The Ludgate Hub is a non-profit social enterprise which services businesses, start-ups, entrepreneurs, creatives and artists by providing a space to network, expand and scale businesses in West Cork. Since opening, the Ludgate Hub has enabled hot desks to be used 4,377 times, created 360 jobs and contributed €4 million to the local economy. The facility is home to event space, hot desks and state of the art meeting rooms.

Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

The key objective was to enable Skibbereen and rural communities in West Cork to thrive in a sustainable manner through enhanced digital connectivity. Business leaders and community representatives collectively agreed the objectives, influenced by organising such as Vodafone who were aiming to install fibre optic infrastructure across rural Ireland, including West Cork.

Within two months the first committee meeting had taken place, attended by eight influential business leaders and community focused individuals with a passion for West Cork to agree the future role of a digitally connected co-working hub.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

The problem in West Cork was a lack of knowledge intensive jobs, so the community and business leaders wanted to attract knowledge intensive jobs to the region and retain young people.

Business leaders and the community collectively recognised a brain drain which needed tackling and a digital co-working hub was the main way to achieve the objectives in the public funding environment between 2014–2016.

However, the single project idea was enabled by the philanthropic donation of the Ludgate Hub's current building and the financing of refurbishment, meaning capital grant funding was not required.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

The Ludgate Hub Team now identify gaps in West Cork in relation to digital skills and knowledge gaps in the community and labour market to target specific community groups.

The consensus within Skibbereen is recognised by the Ludgate Hub and this has been achieved by the Hub continuously adapting and now offering education programmes to benefit the local and wider regional communities.

The full Ludgate Hub Board is made up of national and international partners, with a separate local Ludgate Hub Board actively agreeing and designing projects. The two tier approach has been critical for the Hub's success.

How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

The Ludgate Hub team is small and expands in line with funding and delivering projects. The original planning and operations of the Hub required staff and volunteers with customer service and marketing skills responsible for managing the operations of office space for businesses.

The Ludgate Hub team now possesses individuals with strong project management community development and specialised sector specific skills. Therefore, planning and managing the Ludgate Hub and its programmes and projects requires a team which reflects its activity.

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

The approach to planning and managing projects is driven by funding for the Ludgate Hub, whilst responding to the needs of the local community of Skibbereen, businesses and communities across West Cork.

Since Grainne joined the Ludgate Hub and acting as its current CEO, she has driven a process of actively using key funding networks in Enterprise Ireland, Cork County Council, Local Enterprise Offices and the Wheel to identify opportunities and expand its education programme reach. This process has been driven by the core team, full and local boards of the Ludgate Hub and networking with external organisations.

How did you identify a funding need?

The Ludgate Hub generates a set amount of revenue through rental of office space. However, there is a need for funding to cover the operations of the Hub and expanding its impact and activity.

The Ludgate Hub has a dedicated member of staff who identifies funding opportunities from national and EU sources and wider partners who can potentially provide grant funding or launch pilots in partnership with the Ludgate Hub. For example, Rethink Ireland funded the pilot for the West Cork Reignite Programme at the Ludgate Hub for supporting women in West Cork who were aiming to return to work following the COVID-19 pandemic.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Applying for funding for supporting the Ludgate Hub's operations and wider programme delivery is managed internally. This is driven by the core Ludgate Hub team who also manage the wider funding process following award, from designing programmes to complying with monitoring and reporting.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

The primary barrier is securing funding and securing longer term funding for programmes and operations of the Ludgate Hub. This primary barrier has been overcome by hiring a dedicated resource for identifying funding and partnership opportunities, and applying for a wide range of funding opportunities.

Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

Rural regeneration through digital connectivity was the original project vision and the Ludgate has achieved this and expanded into delivering more dedicated education programmes alongside digitally connecting working spaces.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

Key learnings include:
- Know your potential market
- Deeply understanding your community and wider region
- Establish an active and passionate board for strategy and delivery
- Tailor your plan for the size of the community you wish to support

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

There was an opportunity to develop a second Ludgate Hub site for co-working. However, the opportunity has changed and hybrid is becoming normalised. Therefore the board concluded that a second site may not be required and to avoid oversupply in West Cork.

Generating demand through social media and traditional media is important for the success of a Hub, an activity which has been undertaken since the launch of the Ludgate Hub.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

The local ETB (Education and Training Board), Cork County Council, the Local Enterprise Office, Enterprise Ireland, and West Cork Development Partnership have all been key organisations for designing programmes and shaping the direction of the Hub.

Key contact

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Links

Website: https://www.ludgate.ie/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ludgateSkibbereen

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ludgateireland/

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/ludgate/

Twitter: https://twitter.com/LudgateIreland

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxZOZZcqZQW6YG6tcc85nLQ